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Comparative National Systems



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Introduction

This report considers the comparative politics of Lebanon using the SPECIPIO framework for comparative political analysis. Lebanon is an invariably complex, multi-religious, small state that lies at the crossroads of the Mediterranean region and the Arabian hinterland in Western Asia. Since it attained its independence from France in 1943, this parliamentary democracy has utilized a [confessional](#) system in which representation is allotted on a proportional basis to certain religious communities. Lebanon shares a border with Syria to its north and Israel to its south, and both neighbors have had a significant bearing on Lebanon's political and social climate for decades.

Lebanon's degree of stateness is limited by its lack of control within its territory. Its struggle to quell eruptions of violence, and its reliance on foreign intervention has lessened its level of autonomy. Moreover, its persistent instability has weakened the country's political regime. Over several decades, an influx of Palestinian refugees, as well as Lebanon's cross border relationships, have contributed to its internal simmering tensions.

Due to its diverse religious make up, Lebanon's political system is designed to promote power sharing among its recognized religious groups. This confessional system is implemented in the upper echelons of government, including the executive branch and parliament. Nevertheless, in recent years, the leading and opposition political coalitions have found themselves in political gridlocks as a result of sustained political wrangling. Some of the aforementioned gridlocks have lasted for several months, including one, which left Lebanon without a president for six months.

Stateness

The extent to which Lebanon is a state and the question of what kind of state Lebanon is necessarily depends upon the conditions for stateness. According to Max Weber, a state is the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a defined territory.¹ In addition to this monopoly of violence, a state is a set of organizations – which are more or less coherent, effective, and strong – that seeks to regulate human activity in a defined territory.² There are varying degrees along the continuum of stateness, with failed states on one end of the spectrum and strong, effective, coherent and highly functioning states on the other. Within the aforementioned framework, Lebanon can be deemed a state, albeit to a somewhat limited degree. As an illustration, according to the [2009 Failed States Index](#), Lebanon ranks at number 29 with a score of 93.5.

The most significant limiting factor affecting the degree of Lebanon's stateness is its lack of control over its territory. Since the dawn of independence in 1943, Lebanon's history has been marred by repeated outbursts of violence ranging from short conflicts to a devastating civil war that raged for approximately fifteen years. The majority of conflicts in Lebanon have stemmed from tensions involving international players, namely Syria, Israel and Palestinians.

Syria's ties to Lebanon are extensive and precede Lebanon's independence from France. The territories of Lebanon and Syria were both under the control of the Ottoman Empire up until France took control after World War I. France thereafter separated the territories into what are now known as Syria and Lebanon. As such, Syria has laid claim to Lebanon since its independence, and only recognized Lebanon's

¹ Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation."
http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/lecture/politics_vocation.html.

² Taken from Comparative National Systems class notes from lecture on stateness.

sovereignty in recent times. Syria has thus exacted military and political clout in Lebanon for over half a century. During Lebanon's civil war, which began in 1975, Syria intervened to bring an end to the conflict. The intervention resulted in what some have deemed a [brutal occupation](#), lasting until 2005 when Syrian troops were forced to withdraw after former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, was assassinated. Many believed that Syria and the pro-Syrian Lebanese government were responsible for Hariri's death. Subsequently, Hariri's assassination triggered a series of demonstrations, known as the Cedar Revolution, in which protestors demanded a Syrian troop withdrawal, and a new and more independent Lebanese government. Both demands were met.

Israel and an exodus of the Palestinian population has been another external influence on Lebanon's limited territorial control. In 1948, during the Arab-Israeli war, around a hundred thousand Palestinians fled to Lebanon. This influx was the first of a series of waves of Palestinians to settle in Lebanon. Since the demise of the conflict, the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon has been a source of tension for Lebanese-Israeli relations and internal Lebanese relations. During the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (hereinafter "*PLO*") used southern Lebanon to launch attacks against Israel. In response, Israel invaded Lebanon and occupied the southern region in 1978 and 1982. Israel's 1982 invasion prompted the formation of the Shi'a Muslim political and militant organization, [Hezbollah](#), with Iran's financial support. Israel maintained control of southern Lebanon until 2000 when it decided to withdraw in order to quell attacks initiated by Hezbollah's military wing. Israeli troops withdrew beyond the blue line – pursuant to [UN Security Council Resolution 425](#) – however, Hezbollah declared that its operations against Israel would not cease until Israeli troops withdrew from the disputed border region called the Shebaa Farms.

One such operation initiated by Hezbollah against Israel occurred in July 2006 when two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped during a cross border raid. The operation resulted in the 2006 Lebanon War. During the month long war between Israel and Hezbollah, Israel's air strikes and ground offensive severely damaged Lebanon's infrastructure. The conflict came to an end with the issuance of [UN Security Council resolution 1701](#), however, much of the country lay in ruins and required significant international aid to rebuild.

Implicit in the aforementioned discussion is the power and influence that the Shi'a Islamist Movement, Hezbollah, exerts in Lebanon. Hezbollah – also known as ‘a state within a state’ – has a military wing called the Islamic Resistance, which is more powerful than the Lebanese army.³ Although Hezbollah began as a militia, it has grown into a political and paramilitary entity that has seats in the Lebanese parliament.

When Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term ended in 2007, the parliament failed to vote for his successor. A political gridlock ensued as the opposition demanded that a power sharing deal be created before it voted for a president. As a result, Lebanon remained without a president for six months while the political gridlock endured. Moreover, Lebanon was on the brink of descending into another civil war.

Political Regime

Lebanon is a weak parliamentary democracy that is often embroiled in a political crisis. The constant threat of a precipitous descent into a wide-scale and bitter conflict renders Lebanon's current peaceful and democratic conditions tenuous. This prevailing threat is due, in part, to tense relations among the religious communities, as well as the interplay of external and internal actors who have used Lebanon as a battleground.

A democracy is a regime in which there is a system of government with top leaders who are elected by citizens in regular, free and fair elections. Moreover, basic political rights are protected, and there is freedom to create political parties, free speech and rule of law. [Lebanon has been characterized by](#)

³ Antelava, Natalia. “Lebanon Cabinet Deal Signals Syrian Return.” [BBC News/Middle East](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/middle_east/8378213.stm). 25 Nov. 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/middle_east/8378213.stm.

[Freedom House as 'partly free'](#), with a score of 5 for political rights and a score of 4 for civil liberties.⁴

Although Lebanon emerged as a somewhat peaceful democracy after independence, its descent into a protracted civil war brought a twenty-year end to elections in the country. The last elections to be held before the civil war occurred in 1972; with subsequent elections occurring in 1992 two years after the conflict came to a close. Nevertheless, it has been posited that free and fair elections only returned to Lebanon in 2005 after the Syrian occupation ended.⁵ As is the case with many weak democracies, however, there have been allegations of vote buying, and further allegations that voting districts were heavily gerrymandered to favor certain political parties in Lebanese elections.⁶

Succession occurs in Lebanon with parliamentary elections, wherein members of the National Assembly are elected every five years. Lebanon's power sharing confessional system requires that the 128 parliamentary seats be divided among the major religious sects of the country. Thus, although political representation is based on religion, representatives are elected by universal suffrage.

Lebanon's media enjoy considerable freedom, however, journalists are restricted from reporting from certain Hezbollah controlled areas without the group's requisite permission.⁷ Moreover, the Lebanese people are free to demonstrate and protest publically for or against the government. In fact, a tent camp that was created by the government's opposition supporters remained in close proximity to the government's headquarters four about seventeen months.⁸ Civil society thrives, as nongovernmental organizations are able to carry out their operations unhindered. Workers are free to establish unions,

⁴ Freedom house scores range from 1 to 7 with one being the best score and 7 being the worst score.

⁵ "The World Factbook." [Central Intelligence Agency](#). 11 Nov. 2009
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>.

⁶ "Lebanon 2009." [Freedom House](#).
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7644>.

⁷ See footnote 6.

⁸ See footnote 6.

unless they work for the government, and such unions are able to strike and engage in collective bargaining.⁹

The most significant restrictions in Lebanon occur among the [Palestinian population](#), which subsists under the weight of institutionalized discrimination. Members of this group are not permitted to enjoy the vestiges of democracy. A significant portion of Palestinian born refugees and their descendants live in refugee camps.¹⁰ Some camps have existed since the 1940s when the initial influxes of Palestinian refugees began. On account of the sectarian tensions in Lebanon, members of the Palestinian community are not permitted to become citizens.¹¹ They are not able to legally purchase a house or apartment. Moreover, they are forbidden from working in seventy professions, such as law, journalism and medicine.¹²

Accordingly, as a democracy, Lebanon affords its citizens considerable political and civil liberties. Nonetheless, the benefits of democracy are not far reaching to all within Lebanon's borders. The Palestinian community – including descendants who were born and bred in Lebanon – suffers from institutional discrimination and cannot enjoy the same freedoms enjoyed by Lebanese citizens. The prevailing sectarian tensions in the country render the democratic regime weak and vulnerable, as it risks descending into civil war once again.

Economic Development

⁹ See footnote 6.

¹⁰ There are approximately 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, and an estimated 220,000 live in refugee camps. Butters, Andrew Lee. "Palestinians in Lebanon: A Forgotten People." *Time*. 25 Feb. 2009 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1881651,00.html>.

¹¹ See footnote 10.

¹² See footnote 10.

Generally, there tends to be a correlation between a country's level of economic development and its type of political regime and stability. Accordingly, a democratic system is less likely to collapse once the country's per capita income exceeds \$6055.¹³ In the case of Lebanon, the political regime has transformed since independence, beginning as a democracy and changing during and after the civil war. As such, when Lebanon flourished as a democracy in the years after independence, its economy grew at a steady rate. Lebanon was known as the '[Switzerland of the East](#)' because it was a banking hub in the region. Moreover, Beirut was called the 'Paris of the Middle East' since it was a favored destination in Lebanon given the country's strong tourism sector. Nevertheless, Lebanon's level of economic development was not advanced – in that the GDP per capita was well below the \$6055 threshold, – and due to a variety of factors, including sectarian tensions, the country plunged into a civil war. With the onslaught of the civil war, Lebanon became undemocratic when elections ceased and government institutions were severely diminished. Lebanon's per capita GDP was \$2,250 when the war began.¹⁴ The war subsequently weakened Lebanon's economy significantly and reduced the national output by half. After the civil war, the GDP per capita grew by a staggering 353%.

From the aforementioned facts it can be determined that economic development does have some bearing on the political regime and stability in Lebanon. However, this hypothesis is true only to a limited extent. While Lebanon's level of economic development far surpasses the \$6055 income per capita mark, the country still experiences significant instability. In more recent times, Lebanon's estimated GDP per capita was \$10,300 in 2006, \$10,600 in 2007 and \$11,100 in 2008.¹⁵ Throughout that period, Lebanon

¹³ Przeworski et al., "What makes democracies endure?" *Journal of Democracy* (2006)

¹⁴ "Lebanon – Party of God." *Frontline World*. May 2003
<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/lebanon/facts.html>.

¹⁵ See footnote 5.

has been a democracy, however, the country has plunged into conflicts that have threatened the country's stability.

2006 began with the country still reeling from former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination. The Cedar Revolution had led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, and to the implementation of a new and more independent Lebanese government. However, conflict returned in the form of the 2006 Lebanon war, in which Israel launched air and sea attacks, and implemented a ground offensive after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers. Lebanon was additionally gripped by a political deadlock, with politicians engaged in political wrangling. The deadlock continued into 2007 with the Hezbollah led opposition calling for the government to resign. Later, in 2007, the Nahr al-Bared conflict erupted with fighting between militants and the military in the Palestinian refugee camp. Approximately three hundred people were killed in the clashes, and forty thousand residents fled the camp during the fighting.¹⁶

2007 ended with a power vacuum, as President Emile Lahoud's term ended and parliament failed to elect his successor. The power vacuum persisted until May 2008, when parliament elected Michel Suleiman – an army chief – as president. May, however, also bore scars of violence, because fighting erupted between Hezbollah and pro-government factions that brought the country close to the brink of civil war.¹⁷ Throughout this three-year period, politicians were also killed in bomb attacks. Thus, economic development has not succeeded in quelling the instability that has ravaged Lebanon for decades.

¹⁶ "Timeline: Lebanon." *BBC News*. 11 Nov. 2009
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/819200.stm.

¹⁷ See footnote 16.

Culture and History

Throughout the centuries preceding modern times, Lebanon was a part of various empires, including the Persian, Armenian, Assyrian, Roman, Arab and Ottoman empires. Thus, Lebanon's cultural and religious make up is due, in part, to its diverse past. Most recently, before Lebanon came under French mandate after World War I, Lebanon comprised a portion of the Ottoman Empire for a period exceeding four hundred years. Initially, while under French control, Lebanon was part of the region within Syria. Years later, France created the Lebanese Republic in 1926, which was a separate region from Syria. Lebanon subsequently gained its independence from France in 1943 during World War II.

Lebanon has a unique political system of confessionalism which implements a power sharing arrangement among the country's religious communities. There are 18 recognized religious groups, divided mainly among the Christian and Muslim religions. The Muslim community consists of various sects, including Sunni and Shiite, and smaller sects including Alawite and Druze. In the Christian community, there are also different sects, such as the orthodox Maronites, Protestants, and Catholics.¹⁸ When Lebanon became independent, its unwritten National Pact of 1943 underscored the required religious background for the country's top leadership. For instance, it was stipulated that the president be Maronite Christian, the speaker of parliament be Shiite Muslim, the prime minister be Sunni Muslim, and the deputy speaker of parliament be Greek Orthodox. The religious communities were also allotted a specific amount of seats in Lebanon's parliament.

Initially, after Lebanon's independence, parliamentary seats were allocated to Christians and Muslims at a 6:5 ratio in favor of Christians. The allocation was based on the last official census taken in 1932, which

¹⁸ See footnote 17.

determined that Christians outnumbered Muslims. However, years after independence, the balance shifted. Due to various factors such as a higher emigration rate among Christians, and a higher birthrate among Muslims, Muslims became the majority religious community. Nevertheless, the 6:5 legislative ratio in favor of Christians remained even though demands were made to change the allocation of seats to reflect the demographic change. When the civil war erupted in 1975, one of the causes of the conflict was the failure to reach a political compromise in Lebanon's power sharing arrangement.

The civil war came to an end when the surviving members of Lebanon's 1972-elected parliament signed the [Ta'if Agreement](#) in 1989 in Saudi Arabia. With the Ta'if Agreement, seats in Parliament are now allocated to Muslims and Christians at a 1:1 ratio.

Institutions

Lebanon follows a confessional system, which is a form of consociationalism that guarantees group representation along religious lines. This arrangement was created to accommodate Lebanon's multi-religious population by mandating power sharing among the recognized religious communities. The Lebanese unicameral parliament, known as the National Assembly, contains one hundred and twenty eight seats. In accordance with the confessional distribution mandated by the Ta'if Agreement, sixty-four seats are designated for Muslim representatives, and sixty-four are designated for Christian representatives. Within the Muslim denomination, the seats are divided on a proportional basis among Sunni, Shi'a, Druze and Alawite Muslims. Seats are also divided proportionally among Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Protestant and other Christians. Among the seats allocated to Christians, Maronites hold the greatest share at thirty-four seats. Sunni and

Shi'a Muslims are each allocated twenty-seven seats and thus carry a shared majority among Muslim allocated seats.

The Lebanese parliament, which is the national legislature, is elected by universal suffrage every five years in multi-member constituencies.¹⁹ Even though seats are allocated confessionally, politicians must gain support from other religious communities unless representatives from their religious community dominate their constituency. Thus, politicians in each constituency must receive a majority of votes. This system was created in order to promote cross-confessional cooperation, wherein candidates seek support from outside of their religious community. However, there have been allegations of gerrymandering. For instance, it is claimed that constituency boundaries have been created to favor certain religious groups, such as allocating Christian candidates to Muslim majority constituencies so that they must represent Muslim interests.²⁰

The executive branch of government is composed of the president and the prime minister. The president is elected by parliament to serve a non-renewable six-year term. However, an exception was made in 2004, when then President Emile Lahoud's presidency was extended for another three years at the behest of Syria. Generally, the president appoints the prime minister and deputy prime minister in consultation with the parliament. The prime minister is tasked with forming the cabinet after consultations with the president and parliament. In June 2009, President Suleiman appointed Saad Hariri – former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's son – as prime minister. Saad Hariri then engaged in cabinet negotiations for several months until he formed a [national unity government in November 2009](#).

¹⁹ Until recently, the Lebanese parliament was elected every four years.

²⁰ See footnote 6.

Party Families

The current leading and opposition Lebanese parties are part of coalitions that were formed subsequent to events in 2005 that shook the Lebanese population to its core. Earlier on, in 2004, the controversial Syrian backed decision to extend President Lahoud's six-year term for another three years created a political crisis in which Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri resigned in opposition. Months later, Rafiq Hariri and twenty-one others were killed in a bomb blast. Hariri's assassination sparked a series of demonstrations – called the Cedar Revolution – where thousands of protestors demanded an end to Syria's occupation and the establishment of government that was free of Syrian influence. On March 14th, 2005, Rafiq Hariri's son and the political movement known as the Future Movement led a large protest as part of the Cedar Revolution.

The leading political coalition in the Lebanese government is known as the March 14 Alliance – named for the aforementioned protest. This coalition is comprised of anti-Syrian political parties and independents. It is led by current Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, as well as the leaders of the coalition's political parties. Saad Hariri is the leader of the Future Movement, which has strong ties to Saudi Arabia. The Future Movement is the largest member of the March 14 Alliance, however, it is not an official political party. Some other members of the March 14 Alliance include the March 14 Independents, the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb Party and the Hunchak Party.

In the 2005 and 2009 elections, the March 14 Alliance won an outright majority of parliamentary seats, with 72 seats in 2005 and 71 seats in 2009. The Hezbollah led opposition coalition, known as the March 8 Alliance, won 56 seats in 2005 and 57 in 2009. The opposition coalition is named for the day in 2005 when pro-Syrian parties demonstrated in response to the Cedar Revolution. Their demonstration acknowledged Syria's role in bringing an end to the Lebanese Civil War and its provision of resistance against Israel's occupation. Some of the parties in the March 8 Alliance are the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Marada Movement, the Lebanese Democratic Party, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

After the June, 2009 elections, tensions between the leading and opposition coalitions slowed the negotiation process for the creation of a new government. Six months later, in November 2009, Saad Hariri announced that a compromise had been reached and a unity government had been created.²¹ As a part of the compromise, the opposition received the cabinet seats it had demanded. The new cabinet includes representatives from most of Lebanon's religious communities. However, there are fears that since it took so long to form the government, it may also take long for the government to make decisions given the seething tensions between the leading and opposing political coalitions.²²

International Influences

International players have both tempered and heated Lebanon's politics for decades. Often, when Lebanon found itself in the throes of conflict, there was some measure of international influence. Lebanon lies in a region that is a maelstrom of instability, and accordingly, it has been used as a battleground by numerous powers. While Lebanon maintains ties with various members of the greater international community, the most notable international influences hail from its more immediate region.

The most significant period of international influence came during the fifteen-year civil war. While Lebanon was embroiled in the conflict, forty different armies participated in the fray, including Syrian, Israeli, Iranian and United States armed forces, as well as Palestinian, Christian and Muslim militias.²³ Syria intervened in 1976 to restore peace, however, their intervention became an occupation that ended

²¹ Daragahi, Borzou and Lutz, Meris. "Lebanon Rivals Form Unity Government." Los Angeles Times. 10 Nov. 2009 <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-lebanon-government10-2009nov10,0,7425224.story>.

²² See footnote 21.

²³ See footnote 14.

only with the culmination of the Cedar Revolution in 2005. During and after the civil war, Syria held much political clout in the Lebanese government, which caused many to call for a more independent political regime in 2005. Although Syria has withdrawn militarily from Lebanon, it maintains ties to the opposition in the Lebanese government.

[The Arab League](#) – a Southwest Asian, North and Northeastern African regional organization – has played a key role in several decisions concerning Lebanon over the years. During the civil war, the Arab League legitimated the Syrian troop presence in Lebanon in 1976 with the creation of the Arab Deterrent Force (hereinafter “*ADF*”). The lion’s share of the ADF consisted of Syrian troops, with a smaller share hailing from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Persian Gulf States, Sudan and Libya.²⁴ In more recent times, the Arab League urged the United Nations to order an Israeli withdrawal during Israel’s military onslaught on Lebanon in 2006.²⁵ Moreover, in 2008, the Arab League served as a mediator in Lebanon’s political crisis when government leaders struggled to agree to the composition of a national unity government. That year, the League also supported the election of Michel Suleiman as president after Lebanese officials had failed to elect a president for six months.

The Israeli influence came on the heels of PLO attacks that were launched from southern Lebanon into Israel. The militant Palestinian group used Lebanon, as well as other countries in the region, to carry out its offensive against the Israeli regime. The attacks from southern Lebanon prompted Israeli invasions and military offensives over several years. Notably, in 1982, the Israeli invasion and occupation triggered the creation of Hezbollah. Hezbollah has grown into a political and military organization that enjoys the backing of Iran and Syria, and commands much support within Lebanon. Its goals include the end of the

²⁴“Lebanon’s History.” 30 Sept. 1997 <http://www.ghazi.de/civwar.html>.

²⁵ Penhaul, Karl and Labott, Elise. “Arab League Takes Lebanon Concerns to U.N. Council.” *CNN*. 9 Aug. 2006 <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/08/08/mideast.main/index.html>.

Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon, and the establishment of an Islamist regime in Lebanon. As discussed above, the organization also plays a significant role in Lebanon's political opposition coalition. It controls regions of Lebanon and provides social services to Shiite Muslims, such as schools and hospitals.

Ownership

Lebanon's political system is personality-based and is driven by political candidates' religious denominations. While religious leaders play an important role in politics, powerful families are able to influence votes in elections as well. The current prime minister and billionaire businessman, Saad Hariri, comes from one of the wealthiest families in Lebanon and in the world.

The Hariri fortune began with Rafiq Hariri's business acumen that led to a series of successful construction contracts with the Saudi Royal family. It is through these contracts that Rafiq Hariri became a billionaire. He used his wealth to give back to the Lebanese community, including the provision of a \$12 million donation to the victims of Israel's 1982 invasion. During his time in office as prime minister after the Lebanon's fifteen-year civil war, Rafiq Hariri helped to reconstruct Beirut. Although some accused Rafiq Hariri of corrupt practices, he was a widely supported leader.

[Rafiq Hariri's billionaire son](#) is now prime minister of Lebanon, and is one of the heads of the leading political coalition in government. When he entered the political scene, his political coalition garnered a large majority of the votes in the 2005 elections. The same results occurred in the 2009 elections. As prime minister, he recently succeeded in creating a national unity government after reaching a compromise with the Hezbollah led opposition coalition.

Although the Hariri family and other wealthy families may have some influence on politics in Lebanon, the complex confessional arrangement creates a system that ensures more power sharing among various groups than many political systems around the world. Lebanon's political system is not very centralized, and thus, it presents less room for influence by particular groups in the country. The question of ownership, therefore, carries less weight in Lebanon than it would in a more centralized political regime.

Conclusions

Much of Lebanon's complex history has been marred by conflicts and unrest. What remains to be seen is whether Lebanon can strengthen its control over its territory and bring more stability to the region. Since the demise of the long-term civil war, Lebanon's per capita GDP has grown significantly. Yet, only in more recent times has the country redefined itself as a somewhat independent democracy.

The possibility of peace seems remote, as constant tensions between Hezbollah and Israel in the south threaten to plunge the country into another conflict. Moreover, if the recent cabinet negotiations between the leading and opposition political coalitions are any indication of how the groups will work together as a government, the following years may prove to be challenging. Conflicts also plague Palestinian refugee camps, which are laden with poverty, unrest, and contain militant groups. If the political regime fails to strike a balance of stability, Lebanon's political journey will continue to follow a perilous and volatile path.